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ABSTRACT

With the growing demands placed upon post-secondary institutions for a renewal and restructuring of values and priorities at a time when available resources are decreasing, the importance of planning becomes increasingly apparent. Strategic planning in particular, which deals with the mission, goals, values and resource allocation of the college, which focuses on the process rather than the product, and which assumes a dynamic and constantly evolving education system, has become the critical planning approach for the future of the community college. Recognizing the importance of strategic planning, the New Jersey Chancellor for Higher Education required each county college to develop a strategic plan as a component of Challenge Grant applications. An analysis of master plans developed by 12 of New Jersey's community colleges reveals that all of the plans show remarkably similar concerns. The 1985-90 master plan for Union County College, however, stands out as an exemplary planning document. Developed with extensive faculty participation, the plan is organized into several components, including institutional background, mission and goals, county demographics, student body, a faculty and staff profile, a review of institutional resources, and a plan of action focusing on ten "initiatives" in the areas of recruitment and articulation; curriculum and staff development; linking the humanities and the technologies; linkages with business and industry; high technology; life-long learning; developmental studies; urban initiatives; facilities initiatives; and finances. (PAA)

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POLICY ISSUES AT THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE:

ESSAYS BY FELLOWS

IN THE MID-CAREER FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

MAY 1987

LONG RANGE PLANNING AT THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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In the decade ahead, the projections indicate that community colleges in the United States will be challenged by changes in the demographic profile of students, in the number of potential enrollments, and in the political and economic climate for higher education. Books such as Megatrends, The Third Wave, and College The Undergraduate Experience in America, call for new approaches and renewal of postsecondary education, including a call for a new and coherent debate on the connection between the campus and the world, and new techniques for assessment of the outcomes of undergraduate education. (Boyer, 1987)

With increasing demands upon the institutions, and with a concurrent decrease in the potential resources for allocation to varied purposes, planning becomes more important as a participative function involving faculty, student, staff, community, and administration. Strategic planning -- or that planning dealing with the mission of the college, the values, the goals, and the resource allocation to meet specific priorities -- becomes planning for careful decision-making for the mission and the future of the college.

Cope discussed the differences between long-range planning and strategic planning:

"Long-range planning, for example, so popular in the 1960's implicitly assumed a closed system, within which institutional five- and ten-year blueprints could be constructed. Strategic planning assumes an open system in which organizations are dynamic and constantly changing as they integrate information from turbulent environments. Long-range planning focused upon the final blueprint. Strategic planning focuses upon the process. Long-range planning, with its application of formulas, assumed rationality but was inadequate, as it gave too little

attention to values, politics, and changed circumstances. Strategic planning is rational because it incorporates the reality of the irrational. (Cope, 1981)

In the process of strategic planning, the mission goals, and objectives for the college are reviewed and revised; the organizational structure may be reassessed and revised; decisions may be made to begin new curriculums, or to phase out curriculums that are no longer viable. In addition, new facilities may be planned; renovations and refurbishments of existing facilities may be prioritized; policies and programs may be established or discontinued for instructional programs, student services, community services, budget and accounting services, or facilities maintenance and services. The current research indicates that decisions regarding resource allocation are more accepted by the college community when these decisions are planned through participative strategic planning.

Throughout much of the literature on strategic planning, several components seem to be consistent in the articles describing the planning efforts: First is a general review of the mission of the organization in relationship to the activities. One question is central to this effort: "Is this part of our mission? Or is this changing our mission" The mission of the college, of the individual divisions and departments must be analyzed in relationship to these value questions. Information should also be gathered about the internal operations, including an analysis of the perceived strengths and weaknesses of each internal operation. Data should be gathered on the external environment, with the threats and opportunities carefully delineated. At the core of the strategic planning is the matching of the mission with the strengths of the college, so that alternatives may be developed that capitalize on the opportunities presented.

Finally, resource allocation decisions should be made, by prioritizing the alternative strategies.

In each development of priorities, the strategic planning team should review the value system of the college, the mission and goals of the organization, the feasibility of the proposed plans, and the desirability of the plans, from the view of the community, the students, the faculty, the staff, and the administration. If strategic planning is done well, the process should produce improvements in the organization through a participatory deliberation on alternatives, values, and priorities.

The higher education literature is replete with articles that emphasize the relationship between strategic planning and the values systems of the organizations. One article "Does Your Planning Communicate Action? Is Your Strategic Plan A Coffee Table Book?" describes the following lessons learned from four years of strategic planning:

1. All plans need to be seen as temporary;
2. No plan drawn up in the planner's office could be implemented if it ignored the fleeting, ambiguous nature of the college's and community's political systems, personnel changes, special interest groups, idiosyncrasies, and traditions;
3. A dynamic, changing institution resists balance and order, and plans should always be somewhat behind, if planning is working; and
4. The goal of planning is to go beyond plans and create an environment that enables the organization to spot and solve its own problems. (Osborn, 1986)

Piedmont Technical College in Greenwood, South Carolina, described the use of Ed Quest, a quick environmental scanning technique, which is an

educational planning model designed to identify emerging issues and events which portend threats and opportunities to colleges and universities, to analyze the probable impact of these variables on the organization, and to facilitate the development of appropriate organizational strategies. Especially significant in this technique is the selection of high impact/high probability events in the environment, and the assessment of those events through scenarios of possible futures faced by the college. (Mecca, 1986)

Ward discussed the relationship between perceived institutional mission, sources of funding, and the impact of this relationship on the development of management policy in strategic planning. He noted that many types of organizational stress can be alleviated through strategic planning, especially relating to retrenchment, ensuring access to management information, and budgeting. In his view, this approach to planning must be seen as central to a sound institutional response to the economic uncertainty of the current period. (Ward, 1986)

One report is of particular interest to the community college sector. The Minnesota State Community College Board, in 1984, developed "The Strategic Plan of the Minnesota Community College System," including plans for dealing with enrollment fluctuations, particularly the decrease in postsecondary enrollments that are expected over the next ten years. (Minnesota, 1984) This is an excellent example of a state plan that emphasizes the value of mission of the community college, and that seeks to continue the comprehensive mission of the community college in a time of reduced enrollment and resources.

In New Jersey the Chancellor of Higher Education, Chancellor Hollander, emphasized the need for strategic planning in two significant ways; first, the New Jersey Department of Higher Education required a strategic plan for each college as a component of Challenge Grant applications; second, the department sponsored a Strategic Planning Workshop on February 9, 1987, with keynote speaker Dr. Byron McClenney, President of the Community College of Denver.

Dr. McClenney's presentation focused on various models of strategic planning from community colleges. McClenney listed several statements about the importance of planning and the allocation of resources:

PLANNING AND THE ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

- View organization as either developing or deteriorating.
- See opportunity to create a collective vision of the future. Decide to control the future.
- Make best use of resources such as people, money, space, and time.
- Reaffirm values and beliefs undergirding operation of the institution. (Does the budget implement the important values?)
- Develop and enforce a plan for planning, including a timetable and a simple format.
- Recognize the value in a process of wise decision-making about the future of the organization.
- See potential for resolving conflicts between competing interests within the organization.
- Stress a commitment to ongoing internal and external assessment.
- Identify strategic or critical issues through assessment activity.

- Develop base of useful information for planning from all of the available data.
- Focus decision-making efforts on critical issues.
- Utilize assumptions (useful information) and guidelines (decisions) to facilitate planning.
- Stress the necessary interdependence within the organization.
- Identify and deal with the internal barriers to planning.
- See strategic planning as guiding operational planning (next year) and operational planning as guiding the allocation and reallocation of resources.
- Develop an annual cycle of activity to update the strategic plan, develop the operational plan, and allocate or reallocate resources.
- Involve all levels of the organization in developing the following:
 - Achievements/Results of Current Year (Evaluation)
 - Desired Outcomes for Next Year
 - Projections for Second Year of Cycle
- Develop Priorities for funding projects on basis of plans.
- Utilize plans to make decisions about staffing, acquisition of equipment, and capital projects.

(McClenney, 1987)

The strategic planning workshop was precipitated by the mandate for a plan accompanying the Challenge Grants; nevertheless, however external the motivation, strategic planning in New Jersey has been intensified during this period.

Each of the community colleges in New Jersey was asked to submit a strategic plan for analysis for this paper. Twelve of the nineteen

colleges responded:

Bergen Community College
Brookdale Community College
Burlington County College
Camden County College
Cumberland County College
Hudson County Community College
Middlesex County College
Morris, County College of
Ocean County College
Somerset County College
Union County College
Warren County Community College

Of all the plans submitted, the Union County College Master Plan 1985-1990 stands out as a superior planning document. Union County College involved over 78 faculty and staff members on subcommittees (out of a total of 84 faculty). In addition, a Master Plan Task Force of Chairpersons of committees, a Master Plan Committee, and a Master Plan Final Review Committee were constituted, with the Vice President for Academic Affairs as Chairperson. This extensive participation level was especially important, since the Union College, founded in 1933, was consolidated with Union County Technical Institute, founded in 1960. On August 7, 1982, the two colleges merged to become Union County College. Planning for 1985-1990, then was seen as a priority for the two combined campuses.

The plan is organized into several components, including an overview of the institutional background, the mission and goals, the demographics of the county, the student body, the faculty and staff profile. Academic policies

and programs, instructional resources, student support services, and human and physical resources are analyzed next in the narrative.

After a chapter reviewing the financial resources, including operating funds, renewal and replacement projects, and capital outlay projects, the plan for action is developed, categorized under ten "initiatives."

The ten initiatives could be an outline for any of the conferences for community colleges in the nation. The efforts of the college will be directed towards recruitment and articulation; curriculum and staff development; linking the humanities and the technologies - business and industry; high technology; life-long learning; developmental studies; urban initiatives; facilities initiatives; and finances.

Each initiative begins with an objective, followed by an overview of specific activities that will be developed in the five-year period. As a result of these planned initiatives, Union County College has begun to establish urban centers in two nearby business districts in the county. Also, as a result of the planning efforts and of the grant development efforts, Union County College was awarded over a million dollars from the challenge grants of New Jersey.

In analyzing the planning documents of the community colleges of New Jersey, one is struck by the similarity of concerns of the constitutions, and by the variety of approaches, curriculum, programs, and services developed to address those concerns.

In an environment of decreasing and changing enrollments, shifts in public funding, shrinking operating resources, and concerns about governance, the community colleges of New Jersey have begun to develop strategic plans for their future. The Department of Higher Education, under the direction of Chancellor Hollander, has mandated that planning be developed, and has launched a behavior modification plan involving a support workshop, as well as a positive association - the major challenge grant must address and include a copy of the strategic plan. With all of these external and internal motivations, the community colleges have launched major planning efforts. Strategic planning has become a major public policy issue in the New Jersey Community Colleges.

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